

# PYXIS

Greek, late 4th century B.C.

Opaque glass

H: 3.8 cm - D lid: 7.0 cm - D body: 6.3 cm Among

Reference: 30963



Among the surviving ancient glass pyxides (jewelry or cosmetic boxes), this piece made of opaque green-olive glass is one of the rarest: its size, quality and perfect preservation do not find an immediate parallel. The shape strikes the viewer with the bold design and a highly precise execution. Several pyxides constitute a special class of objects whose chronology spans the entire period of Greek and Roman antiquity. They were made in a variety of materials: gold and silver, ivory, wood, ceramic, stone, and glass; their forms and size also significantly vary. There is a group of glass and marble pyxides which belongs to the Late Classical and Hellenistic period; they are close in spool-like shape: the circular body covered with the domed lid has straight walls, the body is relatively low toward the diameter of the piece. Although the tools and the technique could be different for each material, there is the unifying motif: the alternating deep grooves and ridges which encircle the base and the lid.

Scholars believe that such a characteristic treatment of both marble and glass objects is not necessarily due to the imitation of the first in the pieces of less expensive glass (glass was not a cheap product before the Roman period); it derives from the design and execution of the most exclusive ivory pyxides as well as the most available wooden ones both turned on a lathe and thus exposing perfectly modeled concentric grooves and ridges. As for the glass pyxides, they were cast in a mold, polished and engraved.

The present piece is somewhat apart from the group dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Its lid is less domed and does not have a knob, it is of exactly the same diameter as the outspread, slightly inward-sloping rim to which it makes an exact fit. The pyxis is smaller in size (the average diameter of the lid in the group is 10-12 cm). This probably places the piece in an earlier date of production. The extraordinary crispness and thinness of details along with the smoothness of the polished surface help to compare the piece with a luxurious ivory prototype.

## CONDITION

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## PROVENANCE

Ex- B.R. Wagner collection, Geneva, collected in the late 1960's-1970.

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